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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 001359

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DEPT FOR AF/W DENNISON
PARIS FOR AF WATCHER
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [SOCI](#) [NG](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: A BRIDGE FROM CHINA TO NIGER

REF: A. NIAMEY 1207
[1](#)B. NIAMEY 896

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[1](#)1. Summary. The November 5, 2007 groundbreaking and laying of the first stone for a long-awaited second bridge in the capital city of Niamey symbolizes an increasingly closer relationship between two friends, the Republic of Niger (RON) and the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). Exchanges between the PRC Communist Party leadership and leaders in the MNSD-Nassara (the GON ruling party), a GON National Assembly delegation's visit to counterparts in the PRC Congress, professional and student exchanges showcase the expanding political and social relationships between the RON and PRC. On the economic side, Chinese state enterprises proceed persistently with bids for oil and uranium concessions to meet the PRC's growing energy needs (Ref A). Chinese engagement with Niger is on the upswing. End summary.

[1](#)2. Described as "a memorable, historic event for Niamey", "a dream that has become a reality", and the "fulfillment of President Tandja's promise", the US\$40 million bridge project located 2000 meters downstream from the much celebrated John [1](#)F. Kennedy Bridge (USAID project completed in 1969) led the November 5 and 6 national and local media reports (television, radio and print). The ceremony that highlighted GON President Tandja's laying of the first stone opened with a cultural group performing a song written for the special occasion. GON Cabinet ministers, other senior government officials, National Assembly members, the diplomatic corps, political party leaders and other special guests were present for the event.

[1](#)3. The PRC "bridge" delegation, led by PRC Assistant FM Zhai Jun, had been accompanied from Beijing to Niamey by GON Foreign Minister Aichtatou Mindaoudou. Minister of Equipment Lamido Moumouni Harouna and the Minister of Culture and Arts Oumarou Hadary met the delegation upon arrival at Niamey airport.

[1](#)4. Construction on the four-lane bridge is scheduled to commence in January 2008 with projected completion in three years. The projected dimensions are: 600 meters in length, 23 meters in width, four 3.5 meter-wide lanes and a 2 meter-wide median strip to separate both directions across the bridge. There also are plans for 2.5 meter wide pedestrian lanes on both sides of the bridge and three interchanges with access lanes of 1 kilometer 485 meters in length.

15. Minister of Equipment Harouna, Mayor Abdoulaye Issa of Niamey Commune IV (location for the new bridge) and Governor of Niamey Region Tahirou Amadou all had glowing remarks for GON President Tandja, citing Tandja's personal engagement and perseverance in securing a partner to build a second bridge that had been awaited since the early 1980s. All spoke of the "dynamism of the Sino-Nigerien relationship" and emphasized that "the new, second bridge" will provide much needed relief to the congestion on "the first bridge", a contribution that will enhance the economic and commercial vitality of Niamey and the corridor leading from Niamey to the Burkina Faso border. Several recent, ongoing and future initiatives were cited, such as construction of a new, larger PRC Embassy (with completion reportedly months away) to make room for a larger Chinese diplomatic/official presence in Niger, the completed water treatment plant in Zinder, the General Seyni Kountche Sports Stadium (built by the PRC for the 2005 Francophonie games and which will be refurbished by the Chinese), a housing complex, electrification projects in Bilma, microcredits to women groups, a couple hundred tractors to farmers, US\$1.4 Million for two rural schools (in areas to be determined), US\$450 Thousand to construct a Sino-Nigerien Center to Combat Malaria, a medicine donation (valued at US\$200 Thousand) to combat malaria over a two-year period, agreement to increase from 190 to 442 duty-free categories of potential exports of Nigerien goods to China and cancellation of approximately US\$12 Million debt for Niger.

16. Head of the PRC delegation, Assistant FM Zhai Jun, was granted separate meetings with GON President Tandja and Prime Minister Oumarou during the November 4-6, 2007 visit. Examples of other exchanges over the past 12 months include: 30 medical doctors on year-long rotations to provide health services in local hospitals; 27 and 70 Nigerien students to China, respectively, in 2006 and 2007; a September 2007 visit

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from a Chinese Communist Party delegation to meet with MNSD-Nassara Party leader Hama Amadou and party members (with a pledge to construct a party headquarters); a visit by GON National Assembly President Mahamane Ousmane to the PRC Congress in September 2007 (at which he secured a pledge for US\$300 Thousand in furnishings for the National Assembly); a visit from PRC Assistant Minister of Commerce Wang Chao in December 2006 and GON President Tandja-led delegation to participate in the November 2006 Beijing Summit on Sino-African Cooperation. (Note: Tandja's son is a commercial officer at the Nigerien Embassy in Beijing. End note.)

17. The PRC appetite to prospect in Niger's extractive industries has not been curbed by the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) July 2007 kidnapping in Agadez of a Chinese mining executive from Agelik, an affiliate of the China Nuclear Engineering and Construction firm (Ref B). The MNJ has accused the Chinese firm of not hiring enough Nigeriens from the local region and has faulted the firm for damaging the environment. Chinese workers temporarily have been recalled to Niamey subsequent to the kidnapping and in light of threats from MNJ to strike Chinese operations in the mining areas, but it's unlikely the Chinese will pull out of the extractive mining business. Despite the negative media reports on Chinese hiring practices and lack of attention to environmental concerns (associated with health implications for the local population in the mining regions), recent wide coverage of the Chinese "unconditional" goodwill resonates well with the majority of Nigeriens. In the eyes of many Nigeriens. Moreover, infrastructure projects that create landmarks that will be seen on the Nigerien landscape for many years to come (such as, a bridge, stadium, water plant or malaria center) may ultimately define PRC-GON partnership.

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